

**ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE OF THE COURTS**  
Report Summary

**Special Task Force on Court/Community Outreach**

January 26, 1999

**SUBJECT:** Addressing Public Trust and Confidence: Court and Community Collaboration (Cal. Standards Jud. Admin., § 39 and Cal. Rules of Court, rules 205, 207, and 532.5) (Action Required)

Declining public trust and confidence in the courts is one of the most significant issues facing the justice system today. For more than 25 years, public opinion surveys in California and throughout the United States have documented that (1) fewer than half the members of the public have a generally positive opinion of their local court system; (2) many people believe that the courts are not consistently fair; (3) while many people have more confidence in the courts than in other government institutions, the public is not overwhelmingly confident of the courts; (4) fewer than half the members of the public understand basic legal principles and are familiar with the role and operation of their courts; and (5) most receive information about the court system from the news media.

To address declining public trust and confidence in the justice system, it is imperative that the courts, as justice system leaders, take action to (1) become more responsive to community concerns, and (2) help educate the public about the constitutional role of the courts and the basic principles that govern court operations.

The Judicial Council has an opportunity to exercise its leadership role in addressing issues of public trust and confidence in the state justice system by encouraging judicial officers and court administrators to engage in, within the constraints of the Code of Judicial Ethics, various types of court and community collaboration programs and activities. The task force urges the council to institutionalize court and community collaboration by adopting a new standard of judicial administration and amending existing rules of court, distributing a court and community collaboration handbook to all courts in California, referring responsibility for ongoing oversight of community collaboration activities to the existing Community-Focused Court Planning Implementation Committee, and establishing court and community collaboration as a high priority of the council, as detailed in the recommendations set forth below.

## Recommendation

The Special Task Force on Court/Community Outreach recommends that the Judicial Council:

1. Adopt section 39 of the California Standards of Judicial Administration and amend rules 205, 207, and 532.5 of the California Rules of Court, effective April 1, 1999.
2. Authorize distribution of the handbook *Dialogue: Courts Reaching Out to Their Communities — A Handbook for Creating and Enhancing Court and Community Collaboration*, attached as Appendix J to this report, to all California trial and appellate courts and interested courts nationwide, to encourage the courts, within their local management discretion, to create, maintain, and enhance court and community collaboration activities.
3. Amend the charge to the Community-Focused Court Planning Implementation Committee to include the following: oversight of ongoing court and community collaboration program activities, including but not limited to, interaction with state level education agencies and efforts; liaison with the California Judges Association and the Commission on Judicial Performance on community outreach ethics guidelines; collaboration with the Center for Judicial Education and Research (CJER) to provide training to judges and court staff on court and community collaboration; and addressing other statewide issues related to court and community collaboration, as appropriate.
4. Establish the Judicial Council's court and community collaboration program as a high priority and direct the Administrative Director of the Courts, within his discretion and available resources, to provide staff and financial support to ongoing court and community collaboration program activities.

The text of proposed section 39 of the Standards of Judicial Administration and of amended rules 205, 207, and 532.5 is attached at pages 33–38.